

## PEQUOT



## TRAILS

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY IN THE SPRING, SUMMER, FALL AND WINTER BY THE PEQUOT-SEPOS WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, INC., MYSTIC, CONNECTICUT

Vol. X

Spring of 1958

Number One

## Christmas Bird Census of New London, Connecticut

(7.5-mile radius centering on intersection of Gardner and Ocean Avenues, including Long Island Sound from Rocky Neck to Masons Island, Thames River north to Gales Ferry, and the western two thirds of Fishers Island.)

Common loon	14
Red-throated loon	12
Horned grebe	303
Pied-billed grebe	5
European cormorant	33
Great blue heron	23
Black-crowned night heron	20
Mute swan	35
Canada goose	47
Mallard	331
Common black duck	830
European widgeon	2
Baldpate	64
Pintail	2
Green-winged teal	20
Canvas back	15
Greater scaup	264
Lesser scaup	466
American golden-eye	310
Bufflehead	347
Old-squaw	21
White winged scoter	24
Surf scoter	46
American scoter	1
Hooded merganser	30
American merganser	17
Red-breasted merganser	210
Goshawk	1
Sharp-skinned hawk	1
Cooper's hawk	1
Red-tailed hawk	3
Marsh hawk	6
Pigeon hawk	1
Sparrow hawk	15
Bob-white	10
Ring-necked pheasant	12
Coot	12
Killdeer	3
Purple sandpiper	1
Iceland gull	1
Great black-backed gull	41
Herring gull	2,045
Ring-billed gull	290
Laughing gull	1
Bonaparte's gull	38
Barn owl	2
Horned owl	2
Belted kingfisher	9
Flicker	10
Hairy woodpecker	15
Downy woodpecker	46

See "Bird Census"—Page 3

## NEW YEAR'S DANCE BIG SUCCESS

### Spring Field Trips Begin On Saturday, April 12

The Fall series of Saturday field trips was so well attended that is has been decided to have a more extensive Spring field trip series. Following is a detailed description of each of the Saturday trips to come. This will be your only official notice of the trips so please post this schedule. In addition, your curator will endeavor to announce each trip on Thursdays in the NEW LONDON DAY and the WESTERLY SUN. These notices will be under the Mystic sections.

April 12, 7:00 a.m. Barn Island.  
April 19, 7:00 a.m. Bluff Point.  
April 26, 7:00 a.m. Napatree Point.  
May 3, 7:00 a.m. Home of Frank Eastman, Ledyard.  
May 10, 7:00 a.m. Mitchell's Woods, New London.  
May 17, 7:00 a.m. Harkness Memorial Park, Waterford.  
May 24, 7:00 a.m. Barn Island.  
May 31, 2:00 p.m. Miss Desire Parker's Place, Poquetanuck.

#### Saturday, April 12, Barn Island 7:00 a.m.

The Barn Island trips were very popular last fall so it is only natural that our Spring trips should start at this spot. Local people can meet at the Sanctuary parking lot at 6:45 a.m. or on the Barn Island road at 7:00 a.m. Turn off U.S. No. 1 on the Green Haven Road and take the immediate right to Barn Island. Official starting point will be at the R.R. crossing on this road.

#### Saturday, April 19, Bluff Point 7:00 a.m.

Many of our active members have suggested a field trip to Bluff Point. Thanks to Mr. Walter J. Moran, this trip is now possible. Waterfowl will be the main objective of this trip, with the possibility of some early shore birds. Land birding is also good on the way into the Point. Leave the Sanctuary parking lot at 6:45 a.m. or meet at the Groton Town Hall, Poquonnock Bridge, at 7:00 a.m. Mr. Moran will be the leader for this trip so let's make it a good one.

See "Spring Field Trips"—Page 2

The second annual New Year's Eve Ball for the benefit of the sanctuary was unquestionably one of the high points of the holiday social season. Haywood Gatch, in charge of ticket sales, reports that nearly one hundred couples came to the Mystic Art Gallery to greet the new year together and help the good cause of the sanctuary.

As guests arrived they stepped into a woodland fairyland with authentic birds of all descriptions perched on the walls and swooping down at the dancers from all angles. These imaginative decorations were created by the expert hand of Bonnie Liebig, aided by the hard work of Shelly White, Margie Storrow, Timmy Jones, Bob Burnett and with the generous help of George Ford.

After the customarily noisy celebration at midnight, tempting dishes of foot and hot coffee, all generously donated by friends, were served buffet style in the lower hall. Mrs. David Kellem and Mrs. Robert Anderson were responsible for this part of the program. Unfortunately most people appeared to be on a liquid diet this particular evening and had bird-like appetites.

Indicative of the great success of the dance was the fact that almost all couples stayed until the bitter end under the persuasive influence of various kinds of distilled birdseed and the foot-tapping music of Billy Poore's excellent band.

Assembled nature lovers were given an added treat when the honorable Belton A. Copp performed the very strange and frantic mating dance of the rare Napatree Point night heron near the end of the evening. (Later Copp, excessively modest by nature, tried to persuade friends that he was merely doing an expert and uninhibited mambo.)

Most important, Bob Jones, chairman of the committee, reports that the dance netted over four hundred much needed dollars for the sanctuary.



## BUTEO — A Red-Shouldered Hawk

Came the cold weather, we put suet in our window feeder. We would, as usual, attract chickadees, nuthatches, myrtle warblers, Carolina wrens, downy and hairy woodpeckers, and unwelcome (because too omnipresent) blue jays and grey squirrels. Crows came and sat in nearby trees and watched. Crows are nice too, and very pretty. We hung tough, membraney pieces of suet from high shrubs, from long pieces of strong twine, so that jays could not take them, nor squirrels. Finally, hesitantly, timidly, the crows, with much vocal rumpus, came to the hanging pieces of suet, pulled them up with their bills ("hauled" them up would be more exact) onto the branch on which they were sitting, held them with their feet and began to eat.

Until the red-shouldered hawk appeared. And decided that the suet was his, had been put out for him. He swept the crows off the suet. They whooped but remained at a respectful distance. The hawk picked at the suet, didn't eat it, seemed intent only on showing the crows that it was his, even though he didn't enjoy eating it.

The next day this scene was repeated. This time, though, the hawk swallowed a few pieces of the suet. Not bad. Not bad at all. He ate a little more, oblivious of the circle of crows around him whooping at him.

The following day the hawk came when downy woodpeckers were hanging on the pieces of suet. The hawk thereupon (anybody who still thinks red-shouldered hawks eat birds, please nota bene) swept the woodpeckers off the suet, began eating it himself with real savor. Then he decided to fly off with a piece of suet. He took a firm hold of it with his talons, launched into the air, came to the end of the string, swung head down at the end of the string like a pendulum, huge wings outspread in as beautiful a display of same as anyone could ever wish or hope to witness. After swinging foolishly like this for a few minutes, he let go of the suet, went up on the shrub again, reached down for it again with his bill, got a good hold on it again with his talons, launched into space with it again. With the same result. Downy and hairy woodpeckers, working unconcerned meantime on the other pieces of suspended suet, were not at all interested in, nor embarrassed by, the hawk's silly performance. The hawk wasn't embarrassed either, and he repeated the launchings until by sheer force he pulled the piece of suet free finally from the string, and flew away with it.

Several days later he came back again. He chased crows, he shoved

chickadees aside. He stayed all day this time, systematically eating one piece of suet, very slowly, after another, each about the size of a baseball, until all were consumed.

So from now on, come the cold weather, we'll be putting out suet not only for chickadees, crows, nuthatches, myrtle warblers, Carolina wrens, downy and hairy woodpeckers, and unwelcome (because too omnipresent) blue jays and grey squirrels, but also for Buteo.

Robert O. Erisman  
North Stonington, Conn.

## Bird Houses — A Sound Investment

The value of our song birds as insect destroyers can not be over rated. The more birds you are able to entice to nest in and around your premises, the less insect damage you will have to yourself and your plants. Many of our hole-nesting birds are hard pressed to find a place to nest in our modern world. It is all the rage now, and completely in fashion, to keep our yards well groomed and to prune dead branches and rotten stubs from our trees, and to remove dead trees. With this practice, one has also removed the homes and nesting sites of such birds as woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches, bluebirds, tree swallows, and others. This deficiency can be corrected by placing bird houses of the proper kind in the correct places. The time is drawing near when these hole-nesting birds will be looking for homes. Don't disappoint them, get your bird houses up early. Also, be sure to clean the last year's nests out of your existing houses.

## The President Speaks

Our museum building has been repaired through the generosity of our members and friends. Our curator is busy working on the exhibits. The formal opening will be May 11th. We hope our members and their friends will come and see the museum and give us their ideas and criticism.

We are also fixing the small building in back of the barn museum, which will be heated for use next winter, for classes, lectures, and meetings. We will have an activity that has been our wish for many years, a junior club, which we hope will be a very active part of our organization. Again, many thanks to those of you who have made these things possible.

## Spring Field Trips

(Continued from Page One)

### Saturday, April 26, Napatree Point 7:00 a.m.

Napatree Point is well known to birders and non-birders alike. It is a haven for migrating shore birds in both Spring and Fall. The end of April should be about perfect for these shore birds. Leave the Sanctuary parking lot at 6:30 a.m. or meet at 7:00 a.m. at the parking lot of the Watch Hill Yacht Club. Wear warm clothes as this is apt to be a very cold, windy trip.

### Saturday, May 3, The Home of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Eastman, Shewville Road, Ledyard. Time 7:00 a.m.

This will be a bird trip led by Mr. and Mrs. Eastman. In addition, you will have a chance to observe wildlife plantings designed to attract birds. Leave from the Sanctuary parking lot at 6:30 a.m. or meet at the Eastmans at 7:00. To get there, take Iron Street out of Ledyard Center. Go to the first stop sign, cross directly over this road and take the next road to your right. This will be Shewville Road and the Eastman's home will be the first house on your right. Drive in the driveway where you will find ample parking space.

### Saturday, May 10, Mitchell's Woods, New London. 7:00 a.m.

A Spring field trip to Mitchell's Woods is evolving into an annual event. The trip will have the same objectives as last year—warblers and other woodland birds. We will meet at the tennis courts at Mitchell's Woods, Montauk Avenue, New London.

### Saturday, May 17, Harkness Memorial State Park, Waterford.

This park is a favorite birding spot of The park is a favorite birding spot of New London people. The trip last fall was productive—as this one is almost certain to be. To get to the park, follow the Park signs from the new Turnpike or Great Neck Road, Waterford. Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Bates and Mrs. Barry Dench will be co-leaders and the trip will start from the parking lot.

### Saturday, May 24, Barn Island 7:00 a.m.

The arrangements for this trip will be the same as for the trip of April 12. The waterfowl will be thinned out by this time, but land birding should be excellent. The area provides good wooded and brushland habitats as well as fresh and salt water marshland.

### Saturday, May 31, Desire Parker's Place in Poquetanuck, 2:00 p.m.

Miss Parker's land is some of the most interesting to be found in this area. In addition to open fields and shrub areas, there are rolling hills covered with good stands of pine, hemlocks and mixed hardwoods. It borders the Thames River and affords opportunity for the observation of water



birds. This will be primarily a plant and wildflower trip but bird observations will naturally be included. To get there, proceed to the center of the little village of Poquetanuck. Just opposite the small grocery store you will see a hard-surfaced road leading in a southerly direction. A sign pointing to Aljen Heights will put you on the right road. Follow this road in a southerly direction, past the Aljen Heights development, until you come to a white farm gate on your right. This is slightly less than a mile from the village. Drive through the gateway to the farm house. Miss Parker will serve as trip leader.

## Sunday Bird Walks

### To Be Continued

The Sunday morning bird walks which were started the first Sunday in September proved to be so popular that they were continued throughout the winter at a later hour. The winter walks, starting with the first Sunday in November and continuing through the first Sunday in April, were held at 2:30 p.m. at the Sanctuary. The walks in general have proven popular so your curator has decided to have a walk at the Sanctuary every Sunday throughout the year. Starting with the second Sunday in April, the walks will be shifted to 7:00 a.m. to take advantage of the early morning hours for the bird migration. The walks will continue at 7:00 a.m. through October, when they will once again be moved to 2:30 in the afternoon for the winter months.

## Volunteer Hostesses

### Needed for Museum

Your curator finds that he can be at only one place at a time. A profound statement. The Trailside Museum should be open daily from ten to five, except Mondays, when it is closed completely. We have many valuable exhibits in the museum as well as a large stock of supplies in our trading post. Your curator can not conduct groups through the trails, cut grass and do other necessary maintenance jobs, and still be within sight and sound of the museum. If you feel that you could volunteer a day or a half a day from time to time, please notify your curator. A few people willing to donate several hours occasionally would give your curator the time he needs for other necessary and important work.

## BISHOP BIRD HOUSES

Coconut wren house .....	\$1.90
Bluebird-tree swallow .....	2.70
Chickadee .....	4.50
Flicker-sparrow hawk .....	8.00
Others—From \$1.45 to \$42.95.	

at the

## TRADING POST

## Bird Census

(Continued from Page One)

Horned lark	2
Blue jay	167
Crow	149
Fish crow	3
Black-capped chickadee	241
Tufted titmouse	3
White-breasted nuthatch	34
Red-breasted nuthatch	9
Brown creeper	7
Carolina wren	21
Catbird	3
Brown thrasher	1
Robin	12
Hermit thrush	1
Bluebird	35
Golden-crowned kinglet	2
Ruby-crowned kinglet	6
Starling	1,507
Myrtle warbler	93
English sparrow	482
Eastern meadowlark	7
Reg-winged blackbird	201
Grackle	8
Cowbird	19
Cardinal	8
Evening grosbeak	35
Purple finch	23
Pine grosbeak	5
Redpoll	3
Goldfinch	51
White-winged crossbill	1
Red-eyed towhee	3
Slate-colored junco	240
Tree sparrow	61
Field sparrow	17
White-crowned sparrow	4
White-throated sparrow	143
Fox sparrow	11
Song sparrow	89

Total: 90 species; 9,758 individuals.

Observers: Mr. and Mrs. K. Bates, Mrs. R. Bixler, L. Brooks, Dr. W. W. Brown, B. G. Bruestle, Dr. J. Chadwick, Mrs. B. Dench, Mrs. M. L. Dur-yea, Mr. and Mrs. F. Eastman, H. L. Ferguson, Sr., Jr., and III, Mr. and Mrs. P. Garrett, R. H. Goodwin, Sr. and Jr., Ann Harrington, Mrs. R. Harrington, Mrs. H. Hemond, Mrs. F. Maynard, Mrs. D. MacGregor, Mrs. J. Merrill, Mrs. J. Meyers, W. A. Niering, R. R. Noss, M. Peterson, Mrs. F. Schubert, S. E. Stuntz, Mr. and Mrs. P. H. R. Waldron, W. Wylie.

Additional species seen count period: Mourning Dove, Pine Siskin.

## Evening Walks During May

Thursday evening "warbler walks" will be conducted at the Sanctuary on the five Thursdays in May. The walks will begin at 6:30 p.m. and will last for an hour or until it gets too dark for good observation. Many people can not or will not attend an early morning walk on the week ends, so this will be an opportunity for them and all other interested people to observe birds in the cool of the evening. We won't go far, but the birding should be good at this hour.

## Museum Trading Post

### Stock Is Expanded

We are carrying many new items in our trading post such as prints, miniature birds and animals, jewelry, games, etc. We are constantly trying to add to our stock. So, when you are looking for a present to give, come and see if we don't carry just the item for which you are looking. Your suggestions of new items to stock are always welcome.

Red-wing blackbirds arrived at the Sanctuary in flocks on Sunday, March 2.

\* \* \*

Several Spring Peepers were heard calling on Monday afternoon, March 10. This was two weeks before the first chorus was heard.

\* \* \*

The first pair of wood ducks arrived at the Sanctuary in the middle of the afternoon on Saturday, March 15.

\* \* \*

Wood frogs, which sound like quaking ducks, were first heard on Sunday evening, March 16.

\* \* \*

Woodcock are back once more and were first observed doing their sky "song and dance" on Tuesday, March 18.



## Hawks and Herons Amaze Your Curator

Your curator never fails to be amazed at the adaptability, the instinct, or whatever you want to call it, in birds as well as other forms of wildlife. In another section in this issue of the PEQUOT TRAILS is a report of a red-shouldered hawk which learned to eat suet. The hawk probably started off by harassing the crows that were feeding on the suet. The hawk then tried the suet and found it to his liking. This is certainly adaptability, or a simple case of a hawk learning to eat a new and different food, while the other birds, the owls, stuck to the so-called natural laws, and would not touch a new and unfamiliar food.

Another example of adaptability, or possibly instinct in this case, occurred during the severe cold period in the middle of February. On Monday afternoon, February 17, around 5:00 o'clock, your curator was coming down Hewitt Road towards the Sanctuary, from the Mason's Island traffic light. About 400 yards from the light, a night heron was observed flying up the road, about head high, and right towards the truck. The bird flew up and over the truck, and then settled in a drainage ditch behind and to the left of the truck. The temperature was just slightly above zero, and had been for several days. All ponds were deeply frozen in the area, as well as the Mystic River and all small bays and inlets. There was also a heavy blanket of snow over the area. You can well imagine your Curator's surprise at seeing a heron under these conditions. Backing up for a better view of this drainage ditch, provided a real shock. The water in the ditch was flowing and was only ice-covered in a few places. There were upwards to a dozen herons of different species in this ditch. Some were standing in the water or on the ice. Others were sit-

ting on the ice, legs and feet outstretched in front of them—a position your Curator had never observed before—while still others were in the branches of trees and shrubs along the ditch. There were several adult black-crowned night herons, many immatures of the same species, and two great-blue herons. A kingfisher and several herring gulls were also in the ditch.

This observation amazed as well as worried your curator. With temperatures well below zero expected for that night, it was feared that the birds would freeze in solidly and perish. The next morning early your curator was there, prepared to chop the birds out of the ice. Much to his amazement, all the herons were gone except one which lazily flapped and stopped. Several herons were in the area in the next quarter hour, but none landed in the ditch. This was Tuesday morning. Again that evening, the herons were in the ditch—more of them this time. It was impossible to get an exact count as there were humps of earth, clumps of vegetation and the like that the herons could get behind and escape detection. This evening the birds were catching small fish about as fast as they could grab and swallow them. The ditch was absolutely full of small fish of some undetermined species.

The herons were observed by your curator and other interested people for a little over a week. As soon as the weather moderated and the bays and ponds became open water once more, the herons deserted this drainage ditch. Your curator has checked this ditch almost daily since that time and has failed to see even one heron.

Adaptability — learning — instinct. What brought the fish-eating birds to

this ditch—an area of open water and plentiful food—in this time of severe weather conditions? Was it pure chance that they found the area, or is this something that the birds have learned from former years and sub-freezing weather? Could we delegate this to instinct—an ancestral feeding area in severe weather? Why did the birds suddenly leave the ditch? The food supply remained plentiful and it was certainly an easy place to fish. The only bird which stayed was the kingfisher and he has been there all winter. These are just some thoughts and questions to think about and to stir your imagination. Wildlife seems to make out somehow—it always has.

## Curator Plugs State Conservation Bulletin

Your curator wonders just how many of our members are aware that the State of Connecticut publishes an excellent little bulletin entitled **The Connecticut Wildlife Conservation Bulletin**. This publication comes out six times a year and the subscription rate is \$.50 a year. This is a real bargain. There are articles of interest for everyone, not just the hunter and fisherman. The following, "Harbinger of Spring" is an example from the current issue.

Many people consider the appearance of robins as the sign of Spring. Others say Spring's herald is the bluebird. Still others say that Spring is here when the flowers of the skunk cabbage appear along the margins of the marsh.

But robins and bluebirds may be with us all winter, and the skunk cabbage doesn't appear until the thaw has softened and warmed the ground. So—our vote goes the diminutive spring peeper (*Hyla crucifer*), as nature's harbinger of Spring.

Pequot-sepos Wildlife Sanctuary, Inc.  
Mystic, Connecticut

Miss Hazel A. Johnson  
Connecticut College Library  
New London  
Connecticut

